



EXHIBIT 7
DATE 1/12/2011
HB 2

5 January 2011

Dear Chairman Hollandsworth and Members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee for Education,

On behalf of the Montana Association of Planners I am writing to express our support for the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) and the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS). Together, these two programs provide a valuable service and a wealth of information to Montana's small towns and rural communities, conserving time and money for agencies, business and private citizens.

Legislative planning statutes require staff of local governments to carry out a variety of analyses. In Montana's rural communities and small towns, this typically falls on the shoulders of a part-time planner or a sanitarian, both of whom are already tasked with scores of other responsibilities. Because MTNHP data resources and staff of specialists can be accessed so readily they greatly speed planning and review efforts, helping to avoid unnecessary conflicts and adverse impacts as well as reducing the need for specialists in each county and town.

NRIS provides critical geospatial information for both public and private planners and community development professionals. Data and maps are made available both through the NRIS website and a very helpful and customer-oriented staff. Local governments have found its services extremely helpful in a variety of situations, including the preparation of funding proposals for infrastructure development and community planning documents. In particular, the information provided enables local governments to meet requirements associated with Montana's growth policy statute, such as the location of hazardous wildfire areas and sand and gravel resources. In one recent instance, NRIS staff provided direct support to local governments in southwest Montana as they prepared proposals to site a new Veteran's Home.

Access to factual, objective and neutral information should never be extinguished, which is why it is so critical to keep these programs funded through the Montana State Library – a non-regulatory agency whose mission is to provide access to information and services. It provides an objective and neutral one-stop source for information on the status, distribution, and details of Montana's many resources.

Sincerely,

Montana Association of Planners

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristin Smith", is written over the printed name.

Kristin Smith, AICP
President